

Children of a Lesser God?

Afif Safieh

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merblid

To my sister
DIANA
The anchor of our family in Jerusalem

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ONE PEOPLE TOO MANY?

Translated from French. This interview with Arafat Saifich was published in 1985
in the Belgian newspaper "Le Monde Chrétien".

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Q17. How many Palestinians are there today? Where do they live?

A.S.: There are about five million Palestinians. Seven hundred thousand are in Israel within its pre-1967 boundaries. One million live in the West Bank and 700,000 in the Gaza Strip, these two territories having been under Israeli military occupation since 1967. One and a half million live in Jordan, 400,000 in Lebanon, 300,000 in Kuwait and 250,000 in Syria. Half a million Palestinians are spread throughout the two Americas. In

CHAPTER ONE

ONE PEOPLE TOO MANY?

*Translated from French, this interview with Afif Safieh was published in 1985
in the Belgian magazine, "Vivant Univers"*

VIVANT UNIVERS: What does it mean to be Palestinian?

AFIF SAFIEH: You know, there is a popular saying "Happy peoples have no history". The Palestinian people – should they congratulate themselves, or should they be regretful? – are burdened by a history several thousand years old.

To be Palestinian today means to have been deprived of the elementary right to live in one's country. It means having been displaced by force, time after time, from one place to another, and under conditions of complete destitution. It means having lost one's property, the plot of land which one cultivated, and the home one lived in. It means helplessly witnessing the gradual Judaization of one's homeland, and the removal of the Arab influence and presence from it.

It means having no identity papers like all the other citizens of the world have. It means having administrative problems throughout one's life, from birth to death, a death which is often caused by arms and bombs which have been prohibited by international law but which have been discharged indiscriminately, with a preference for civilian targets, in order to terrorize the population. It means unimaginable complications when one sets out to search for a job, and interminable waits in airports and at borders.

To be a Palestinian means belonging to a family which has been broken up and scattered to all corners of the world. My family, for example, which consists of five people, lives in three different continents. My parents and one sister are in Jerusalem, my brother in Brazil and I am in Belgium. At the time of my father's death two years ago, I could not return to his side "because of the military occupation".

Those who have been able to remain in the country feel unwanted there. They are subjected to daily harassment; they are pushed into an emigration which has nothing voluntary about it. Juridical harassment (expropriation), economic harassment (unbearable taxes pillage of hydraulic resources), police repression . . . The overwhelming majority of Palestinian adults have already been imprisoned at least once by the occupation authorities. In the prisons, the practice of torture is frequent. When there are protest demonstrations, it often happens that the forces of "order" which "officially" receive orders to fire into the air, prefer to aim at the air which is to be found in the lungs of the demonstrators . . .

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every country of the world you will find Palestinian communities of different sizes.

But whether they live in occupied lands, are stuck in refugee camps, or are experiencing exile in a far-off country, all Palestinians share common sufferings and aspirations; to be able to exercise their right of return, their right to self-determination and to national sovereignty.

At the cross section of three continents (Asia, Africa and Europe), Palestine has been throughout time the object of external desires. My father's generation, for example, witnessed three distinct and successive phases of national oppression: Turkish domination until 1917, followed by the British Mandate (1917-1948) which then favoured Zionist penetration (1948). But the last distinguished itself from the preceding aggressions. Zionism, an imported ideology, also recruited its followers abroad. With the aim of transforming Palestine into "a country just as Jewish as England was English", it could not succeed in its enterprise except through the subordination or expulsion of the indigenous population. The Zionist movement, and then the State of Israel, imposed a double human migration on Palestine: on the one hand, the massive expulsion of the Palestinians to the periphery of their national soil and, on the other, the arrival – just as massive – of settlers to replace them.

In this way then, Israel constituted the last colonial project – accomplished paradoxically in the age of decolonisation .

V.U.: But a certain "History" insists on presenting Palestine as "a land without a people" which was to have been offered to a "people without a land". What truth is there in this? Was Palestine really nothing but an uncultivated and arid desert?

A.S.: The Zionist movement is a master in the art of fabricating myths and it appears that the Palestinian people were condemned, not only to have their rights despoiled but to be systematically denigrated as well. It was in order to "legitimise" its visions regarding this monstrosity: that is, the "demographic vacuum" in the country, which would therefore be colonisable without injustice and without remorse. This is a conceptual genocide.

As a matter of fact, many Zionist colonizers left Palestine once they discovered a people like any other, made up of city-dwellers, countryfolk and nomads, all of whom aspired to independence. But that was nothing but the reaction of a tiny minority.

The majority, with full prior knowledge, were to pursue their colonial project and continue to attract new waves of immigrants. And this with the support of Great Britain. Lord Balfour, Minister for Foreign Affairs, was to write, "In Palestine we do not envisage undertaking the consultation of the will of the present inhabitants", explaining that Zionism was, for Great Britain, of greater importance than "the desires and prejudices of 700,000 Arabs who now live in this ancient land".¹

As acknowledged by the British themselves then, 700,000 Palestinians lived in Palestine in 1917. On such grounds as these and according to this logic, how many states which are today members of the United Nations, could be considered "lands without people", available for enterprises of domination and monopoly?

An Israeli intellectual, Saul Friedlander, unable to deny the demographic evidence, was to speak of the confrontation between the "subjective right" of the Jews to Palestine and the "objective right" of the Palestinians in Palestine.² Interesting formulation! Yet, while I might understand what an "objective right" is, I cannot keep from finding the

notion of a "subjective right" strange and even dangerous. It paves the way for so many crimes . . .

As to the second formula, "the people without a land", would require a lengthy elaboration the limits of this interview render difficult. Nevertheless, permit me to dissipate and refute some of the "admitted truths" which are the most contestable.

Above all, the majority of today's Jews cannot be among the descendants of the ancient Hebrews of Palestine. Many of them converted to other religions. On the other hand, many people and tribes converted to Judaism. The best known example is that of the Khazars, a tribe of half a million people who massively adopted Judaism in the VIIth century.³ Is the argument of "the historic right" valid then? Is the colonisation of Palestine really "the return after two thousand years of exile"?

Now then, many scholars, such as Maxime Rodinson to cite only one of them, inform us that the present Palestinians have more "Hebrew blood" in their veins than most of today's Jews.

As to the notion of "divine right", since there has been the "divine promise" made to the "chosen people", I – like many Jews moreover – cannot admit this image of a God who would commit the sin of 'favouritism', of a God who would be a 'discriminator'. I prefer to refer to what Golda Meir says to us in her memoirs: "The Jews were the first to have chosen God". She has not always shown such subtlety and sophistication, but I must admit that this interpretation is by far preferable to that of the "chosen people", keeping in mind that it was in fact the dignitaries of Pharaonic Egypt who were the first to preach monotheism . . .

Finally, anti-Semitism is above all a Christian and essentially a European phenomenon. The solution to it must be sought in the same countries where it rages, through the struggle for equal rights and responsibilities, through the fight for the right to be different and for freedom of religion, and through inter-community integration. But anti-Semitism and Zionism are two currents which go together and feed each other reciprocally. Thus Israel, through its practices and alliances – which often go so far as to include active support for bloody dictatorships – has come to reinforce if not to arouse anti-Semitism in regions where it was almost nonexistent, for example in the countries of Latin America or the Arab World. Now, both anti-Semites and Zionists try to lead us to believe that anti-Semitism is an uneradicable and eternal feeling . . . I dare to believe, I dare to hope that it is not.

But let us go back to the alibi of the barren, uncultivated Palestine. It is necessary to read the accounts of the Crusades. In them we learn that the Crusaders admitted having learned enormously from the techniques of agriculture and irrigation used in Palestine in that epoch. It would be necessary to look at the figures for external commerce before the XXth century, where we would see that Palestine was not only self-sufficient in food, but exported fruit and vegetables to Europe.

That Israel would have increased the agricultural capacity of the country is not surprising considering the enormous injection of foreign capital and the superior qualifications of the Zionist settlers who came from Europe. But here a great moral question is posed: in the name of what, and since when, does the planting of a tree justify the uprooting of a human being? Since when does the decision to plant a forest justify the uprooting of an entire people?

V.U.: What do you think of the attitude of international public opinion towards the Palestinian problem?

A.S.: I would limit myself to Western opinion. Lately it has evolved considerably. It finally recognises that the Palestinians have suffered an historic wrong and wishes to see them recoup certain rights previously trampled on. But its vigilance and the pressure which it sometimes decides to exercise, are well below that which could be expected of it.

The Palestinians cannot but remember with sadness and bitterness that the enterprise which led to their dispossession and their dispersion was followed by Western public opinion with an admiring, never reprobating, regard towards Israel. Insensitive to the trials of the Palestinians, it applauded the exploits – above all the ones of war – of Israel.

This can be explained by the painful and sometimes guilty memories of the atrocities committed during the Second World War. But if the Jews were the direct victims of Nazism, then the Palestinians are its indirect victims. Without Hitler, Zionism would have remained a minority current within the Jewish communities. Without Hitler and his attempts at exterminating the Jews, the Zionist movement would not have benefited from this capital of sympathy which it has used and abused. From this indulgence, this complacency which touches on complicity.

It is important to point out that the first in the West to dare to rebel against Israel's false propaganda were Jews: Maxime Rodinson, Ania Francos, Alfred Lilienthal . . . They believed themselves safe from intellectual terrorism and the accusation of anti-Semitism, but they were mistaken: they were harshly attacked, reviled and threatened. They were accused of "self-hatred" and betrayal . . .

Over the decades, solving the 'Jewish problem' was a high priority objective for Western opinion, even if it meant paying for it with a 'Palestinian problem'. One would have wished that the Palestinians did not exist, that they would have disappeared before the arrival of the settlers. In short, they had committed the wrong of existing.

The Zionist colonisation of Palestine enjoyed great popularity in the West and it was the resistance of the people who were the victims of this dispossession which was to be condemned. The Palestinian was to be described as a brute, a fanatic, and a terrorist. At best, a potential terrorist.

Paradoxically, the Zionists themselves judged this resistance to be . . . normal. Jabotinsky, the master thinker of the Israeli right, was to write, "Has any people ever been seen to give up its territory of its own free will? In the same way, the Arabs of Palestine will not renounce their sovereignty without violence."⁴

Ben Gurion said to Nahum Goldmann: "If I were an Arab leader, I would never sign an agreement with Israel. It is normal, we have taken their country. It is true that God promised it to us, but how could that possibly interest them? Our God is not theirs. There has been anti-Semitism, the Nazis, Hitler, Auschwitz: but was that their fault? They see but one thing: we have come and we have stolen their country. Why would they accept that?"⁵

In the West, on the other hand, this clarity of perception was forbidden. Phillippe de Saint Robert tells us that a reader reproached him for his, "impartiality which is intolerable when Israel is in question."⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre was to write, "Without a doubt they (the Arabs) are right, but can they keep these Israelis from being, for us, also Jews?" This is why impartiality becomes intolerable and objectivity unwelcome.

V. U.: Why have many Palestinians left their country and their lands?

A.S.: You have probably asked me this question because there are those who claim that the Palestinians left their country of their own accord. This is absolutely contrary to historic reality. But it seems to me that they who have propagated this version as well as they who have let themselves be convinced by it, have never asked themselves the following question: do the civilian refugees coming from combat zones in other conflicts equally automatically lose all rights to return and their property? Of course not!

Thus at the time of the German invasion of France in 1940, thousands of French people left. Once the fighting had ended, they were able to return to their homes, their towns and villages. In Palestine, the civilian population was a privileged target for the Zionist troops who sought to conquer the maximum of territory with a minimum of demography. This is what profoundly differentiates this war in the Middle East from any other conflict.

While the massacre at Deir Yassin (1948), in the course of which 254 peaceful villagers were liquidated in a single night, is the most well-known, it was unfortunately not the only one. Menachem Begin, the one politically in charge and who gave the orders for this carnage, was often to boast loudly claiming that without Deir Yassin, there would never have been an Israel. In his memoirs, he wrote. "The Jewish forces advanced in Haifa like a knife in butter. The Arabs fled in panic, crying Deir Yassin".⁸ It was necessary to terrorize the population in order to encourage them to flee.

It is useful to remember that according to the cutting up of Palestine contained in the Partition Plan adopted by the United Nations, there was to be a small Jewish minority in the Arab state, while in the territory granted to the Jewish State, the Arab population was equal in number to the Jews who had installed themselves there. For a political movement, Zionism, which wanted, "an Israel as Jewish as England is English", the presence of these Arabs was inadmissible, intolerable!

In 1948, the State of Israel was admitted to the United Nations but in a conditional manner: it had to permit the return of all the refugees which its violent and brutal birth had flung out along the path of exile.

This resolution had been submitted to a vote by the United States and each year since then it is once again voted on and adopted by the international community. But it has never even begun to be applied. On the contrary, new refugees have regularly come to join the previous ones.

V.U.: There is often talk of the 'settlement colonies' in the occupied territories. What do these implantations represent?

A.S.: A first remark is called for: it was under the aegis of the Israeli Labour Party that the policy of creating settlement colonies in the occupied territories was begun in 1967. General Dayan, to whom we must grant the merit of frankness, called this process "rampant annexation". Under Menachem Begin and the Likud, it just galloped. But the main difference resides in nothing more than the rhythm.

It is this process of the gradual nibbling away of Palestinian territory which has permitted the creation of the State of Israel: a succession of *fait accomplis*, legitimised afterwards by the always favourable balance of military power.

Since the first hours of its creation, Israel has shown itself to have an insatiable territorial appetite. Its leaders start out from a very elastic conception of the

frontiers of the State which they themselves have carved out. For Israel, right follows from *fait-accomplis* on the ground, both military and demographic.

The peace camp in Israel defends the idea that it is necessary to "liberate Israel of these occupied territories" in order to disentangle itself from this interminable war. Unfortunately, this current is very much a minority. The overwhelming majority of Israeli voters pronounce themselves regularly and . . . democratically in favour of annexation and the denial of the minimal national rights of the Palestinians.

Yet, they would have been well inspired to recall the words of Rabbi Heschel, who had declared, "In a free society, if a few are guilty, all are responsible." Perhaps one day we might be told in order to justify the oppression of the past that "We did not know". This talk will be no more credible tomorrow than it was yesterday.

V.U.: What does the P.L.O. represent for the Palestinian people?

A.S.: Put simply, it represents them. Before 1964-65 the Palestinians were threatened with oblivion – because of their dispersion, their lack of organisation. The PLO gave them back both hope and initiative. From objects of history, they have become once again subjects of their own history. The PLO is the incarnation of their aspirations; it is a vehicle and channel for their fight for a concrete objective. With modest means, the PLO has worked on the restructuring of this torn and 'diasporized' people.

The mass media have, unfortunately, focused on the military aspect; they have bluntly hidden the immense work which the PLO carries out on a sanitation, educational and economic level in order to preserve the national identity, dignity and cultural patrimony of the Palestinian people.

The PLO is perceived of as a pre-governmental organisation which is already assuming state responsibilities.

The Palestinians have chosen it, and designated it to be their spokesman and their negotiator in the search for the peace they long for so much.

I would not dodge the problem of violence. I know: some identify the PLO with terrorism.

Believe me, the dominated peoples are always the first to wish that an end be put to their suffering, without bloodshed, and the first to hope that their liberation will be accomplished through peaceful mechanisms and institutional channels. But, in reality, no other choice was left to them but to resort to armed struggle in order to confront the state terrorism which they had to face. Remember that Israeli violence has left more Palestinian victims in three days than Palestinian violence has left in three decades. The Palestinians have been sent into mourning a thousand times more than the Israelis.

Why does Western opinion demonstrate such selective sensitivity? Especially when, in such and evident manner, the sufferings are disproportionate to such an extent . . .

V.U.: Now, what future awaits Palestine?

A.S.: Today, there is no 'just solution' for Palestine or the Palestinians. Too many disruptions have been imposed by force.

The Palestinians, who are today 'the Jews of the Israelis' do not wish to see that tomorrow the Jews of Palestine become in turn the Palestinians of the Palestinians.

We do not seek historic revenge. On the contrary, we want to smash this infernal

dialectic of oppression. If a 'just solution' is inconceivable at the present time, an 'acceptable peace' is nevertheless always possible.

The formula of two neighbouring states on Palestinian territory would render partial justice to the Palestinians. Moreover, this solution conforms to the wishes of the international community and the resolutions of the United Nations.

Unfortunately, two dissident states – Israel and the United States – render the international consensus inoperable.

How could this Palestinian state be born? Three courses are possible:

First of all, a profound change coming from inside Israel. I am among those who had bet on this course and who acted consequently. This way had my preference, essentially for ethical reasons.

If the Israelis, without having been forced to do so militarily or diplomatically, were to restore the territories conquered in 1967 to the Palestinians, or if they were to come back to the United Nations Partition Plan, that would facilitate both authentic pardon and reconciliation. Unfortunately, the 1984 Knesset elections reveal nothing but a further slide towards annexationism or, at best, immobilism.

The second possible course would be a new Israeli-Arab war according to the model of 1973, in order to seriously reactivate the diplomatic front and the search for peace. Besides the fact that war is never a desirable eventuality, the state of the Arab World, with its present divisions and the resulting impotence, render this hypothesis improbable, at least in the short term.

Finally, the third course envisageable, taking into account the fact that the status quo is showing itself to be intolerable and highly explosive, and that Israeli intransigence on one hand and Arab powerlessness on the other do nothing but perpetuate this situation – I am personally in favour of a peace process actively stimulated (I would even say imposed) by the international community, on the basis of the whole set of United Nations resolutions.

The United Nations is still the only framework in a position to reconcile politics with ethics. It could temper the arguments of force, reminding the protagonists of the force of arguments.

If that fails, the spiral of violence would experience an uncontrollable escalation. And the conflict could burst out of its regional framework.

In the Middle East, we have either one people too many, or one State less than what is needed.

It is for each of us to pronounce himself. Must we allow the annihilation of this one people too many? Or must we work to make possible the birth of the State which is missing?

FOOTNOTES

1. In a letter to Lord Curzon, cited by Gilmor D., in *Dispossessed: The Ordeal of the Palestinians*.
2. Friedlander, S. *Reflexions sur l'Avenir d'Israel* p.11.
3. Koestler, A. *La Triezième Tribu*.
4. Jabotinsky, cited by M. Rodinson in *Peuple Juif ou Problème Juif?* pp. 121-122.
5. Goldmann, I.N. *Ou va Israel?* and in *Le Paradoxe Juif*.
6. de Saint-Robert, P. *Le Jeu de la France en Méditerranée* p.95.
7. Sartre, J.P. *Les Temps Modernes*, no. 253 bis. 1967, p.10.
8. Begin, M. *La Révolte d'Israël*. Pion 1953, p.160.

CHAPTER TWO

SUPERPOWER POLITICS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Published by two 18 year old students in the magazine of Lancing College (mid 1991)

A Meeting with the PLO Representative in London

It was from a drab, drizzly day in London, that we entered the PLO delegation. We were offered coffee and Arabic newspapers in a warm, smoky waiting room. Neil Sheldon and I had had the good fortune to get to the final of the *Observer Mace* debating competition. Our task was to oppose the motion that "This House believes that the power of the United States had increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished". In order to prepare for this, Dr Buck and I had been to a meeting about "American foreign policy in the Middle East", where we were lucky enough to meet Mr Afif Safieh, representative of the PLO in London. To our great surprise, he generously invited us to come and discuss the debate with him. Such opportunities are not to be missed.

The first pillar of our argument was to be that, in fact, the American economy is no longer expanding, and so its power is not increasing any more. Mr Safieh acknowledged that there are two schools of thought about superpower politics. One school of thought is called the declinists: those who advocate that over the last decade or more the relative power and influence of the USA has rather declined. They argue that during the last few years we have witnessed an emergence of other centres of power – Japan, Europe, and other countries. Even though the Americans maintain military supremacy, in a pacified world, military supremacy is not the only strategic factor for the measurement of power and influence, and you have to look at the emerging poles in the international system.

There is another school of thought which says that the American power is the hegemon: unparalleled, unrivalled, unchallenged. The Soviet Union as an empire, as a pole, has been diminished, after a double assault on its cohesion and strength. The first was an ideological assault during the Carter period, demanding human rights be observed. The second assault came during the Reagan period, with the arms race. This school of thought argues that America, the West, has won. We are witnessing a decline of the Soviet Union, and since all the other poles are of an economic nature, civilian powers, that don't constitute any serious competition.

I could sense that, instinctively, Mr Safieh was more convinced by this second approach. "During the last five years, we have moved beyond the bipolar system, where you had two superpowers of equal strengths, or at least of sufficiently dissuasive capabilities on either side to create a sort of global equilibrium. We have moved from the bipolar system – not towards a multipolar system that I for one would have preferred, but towards a monopolar system where, in a way, Washington appears to be the contemporary Rome, managing the globe".

But did the power of America really increase as a result of the Gulf war? Isn't power really shifting to the strong economies of Japan and the EEC?

"Before the Gulf Crisis, tensions were rising in relations between the USA and Japan, the USA and EEC. Because in a period of protracted peace, it's the ally that becomes the competitor. I believe that many in Washington wanted the political confrontation in the Gulf, so that in international relations military power will again have primacy in the hierarchy of power. In periods of peace, it's the economic achievements, the productivity, and the exportation levels that obtain primacy. In periods of military confrontation the military dimension regains primacy. So I think that in decision-making centres in America, the thought of reasserting American supremacy was not far off. In a way they made it understood to the Germans, the Japanese and the EEC countries, who is 'Numero uno'."

Is it in the interests of the Palestinians that the military dimension should regain primacy? Recently, the PLO denounced terrorism. The UN charter allows any people oppressed by alien occupation to resort to armed struggle. But the major components of the PLO to which Mr Safieh belongs have deliberately decided not to resort to armed struggle, because there are now avenues for diplomatic transactions. Mr Safieh told us.

I am in favour of the non-violent school because I think that non-violence is more destabilising than violence. Since Israel is the predominantly military power in the area, its strongest aspect is in the military dimension. When the Intifada maintains its mainly non-violent features, it immobilises 99.9 percent of the Israeli military capabilities. Israel can neither deploy its nuclear capabilities, nor its navy, nor its aviation, nor its tank force. They still use tear-gas and bullets, which are extremely lethal, but this is only 0.1 percent of their military capabilities. Faisal Hussaini once said, "If ever Tyson – the world champion in heavyweight boxing – comes to challenge you, you don't invite him to the boxing ring. You invite him to the chessboard, where you have a decent chance to win." In the boxing ring, you are the sure loser.

How does American foreign policy affect Middle Eastern affairs? Mr Safieh told us: I've always said that the key to war and peace resides in Washington. There are two schools of thought again on the American-Israeli relationship. One speaks of an Israeli America, and the other speaks of an American Israel. One says it is the global superpower that dictates policies of its regional client, and the other says it is the global power that adopts the regional preferences of its client state. So does America dictate policies on Israel, or does America adopt Israeli policies? I believe that both those schools of thought are correct, but at different moments in history, and at different moments of that complex pattern of relations between the global protector and the regional client. I tend to believe that more frequently, it is the second school of thought which is more accurate. Because the Middle East is part of the domestic debate (and we know how strong Israel actually is in the domestic American arena). The Americans often get coaxed into adopting the Israeli strategy, policy, and preference.

This was manifest during the Reagan period, which many call the Reagan "siesta". The Irangate event illustrates this phenomenon, of America adopting the regional preferences of its client state. In Israel, the Ben Gurion doctrine says, "Since we live in a hostile environment, we have to make an alliance with the environment of our environment." This strategy aimed to make a network of alliances with Turkey, Iran,

Ethiopia, whatever the nature of the political regime in power. It has nothing to do with the ideological policy, be it of the Shah or Khomeini. What happened in Irangate is the following: the Americans were convinced to pump arms and money into revolutionary Islamic Iran against Iraq, the regional competitor of Israel. At no moment was American strategy to help promote the chances of the Islamic revolution. Its strategy was to assist the Israelis. Here is a situation where the Americans adopt the Israeli strategy and preference, even if it is in contradiction to their own national interests.

In the Gulf crisis, Mr Safieh felt that "Rome was in Tel Aviv, and Tel Aviv had succeeded in mobilising Washington as its own regional belligerent Sparta. The Israelis succeeded in having the Americans in a situation where they would crush the regional competitor of Israeli hegemony, which was Iraq."

Have the USA-USSR regulations affected the emigration of Soviet Jews into Israel? Mr Safieh replied, "I believe that we the Palestinians have suffered from both Soviet strength and Soviet weakness." At moments during the three decades of supposed Soviet strength, the Israelis convinced the Americans that they were the strategic asset capable of containing Soviet expansionism. They took advantage of the Soviet pseudo-strength, in order to be flooded with money and weaponry. Then they took advantage of the Soviet weakness by extorting from the Soviets all possible concessions, including unlimited Soviet Jewish immigration towards only Israel.

The turning point took place when Bush met Gorbachev in Malta. It is then that serious decisions concerning the Soviet Jewish migration were taken. Up to the Malta summit, more than 90 percent of the Soviet Jews that were leaving the Soviet Union were going elsewhere than Israel-Palestine. And less than 10 percent were choosing to go to Israel-Palestine. After the Malta summit, the proportions were exactly reversed: over 90 percent were ending up in Israel-Palestine, and less than 10 percent were able to go elsewhere. The Americans were pressured by the Israelis to ensure that Soviet Jewish emigration should be channelled only to Israel.

The freedom of choice of the country of destination has always been a Jewish concern. This concern has been violated because now they are being channelled like cattle only to Israel. So the pro-Israeli lobby prevailed over a traditional Jewish concern, because it wanted to give an advantage to Israel: having one or two million additional citizens. The Malta summit was accompanied by the Western countries, mainly the USA, but also EEC countries, reducing their quota of reception for Soviet-Jewish migration. At a moment when it had succeeded in pressuring the Soviets to open doors and let Soviet Jews leave if they do desired, the West closed its doors for those Soviet-Jewish migrants who would have preferred to emigrate to a Western country.

How do the Palestinians feel about President Bush? Mr Safieh believes that "We in the Arab world always prefer an American President that is strong and comfortable, whereas the Israelis prefer a vulnerable American President. This is why we are encouraged by the popularity rating of Bush, even though we think the reasons of his popularity are of a questionable nature. But we are happy that he is so popular, and that he can (if he so wanted) be decisive, assertive and confront any lobby that wants to obstruct his intentions. I have always said that the best American President for the Middle East would have the ethics of a Carter, the popularity of a Reagan, and the strategic audacity of a Nixon. But we have to do with what we have. I don't think that

Bush has the ethics of a Carter, he has the popularity of a Reagan, the question is does he have the strategic audacity of a Nixon?"

I am encouraged by one or two factors, which are the following. Bush and Baker are comfortable today, electorally speaking, and there is no serious challenge around the democratic side. Number two, they form a cohesive team, unlike in previous administrations where there was constant rivalry between the White House, the National Security adviser, the State Department man, and the Pentagon. Stanley Hoffman spoke of 'institutionalised pluralism' where an undecided President Carter was subjected to conflicting advice. But this team is very cohesive, and they owe nothing for their first election or for the re-election to the pro-Israeli lobby. So if they so wanted, they can be extremely decisive and assertive." A Zionist leader, Nahum Goldmann, commenting critically on Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy, said that "It seems to me that diplomacy in the Middle East is the art of delaying the inevitable as long as possible." Already for him in the early seventies, the inevitable was the Palestinian factor. In one of his books he speaks of a discussion he had with Moshe Dayan. He tells him, 'Moshe, the Americans up to now give you much aid and some advice. You take all the aid and you leave the advice aside. What would happen if ever the Americans were to tell you, "You can only take the aid if you also take the advice"?' , and Moshe with resignation tells him, 'Then we have also to take the advice'. So linkage there has potential: linking American aid to American advice.

Mr Safieh explained. "Since we live in a monopolar world, where Washington resembles Rome, I think we all have to work, as Palestinians, Arabs, the peace camp among Israelis and within Jewish communities, the Europeans and others, on the formulation and the elaboration of American foreign policy towards our area. That means that we have to convince the Americans to reconcile their power and their principles. We believe that self-determination is a cornerstone in the American political philosophy. It means the freedom of choice of one's form of government, one's governors, and government by consent, not through coercion; government with democratic representation, not through bureaucratic repression. So we have to persuade and pressure the Americans to link their aid to their advice in their relationship with the Israelis."

If American power were to be diminished, how would it be done? Mr Safieh asserted, "I am of the belief that the only credible alternative today to American hegemony is UN supremacy. But the UN also needs to be liberated; as we witnessed during the Gulf crisis, the UN was very manipulated by the US. They bought votes and vetos. When Gorbachov had his own initiative on ending the war, during the last days of the war, Bush had a very condescending attitude, and was the first to answer 'No'. That proposal was submitted to the International Community, and to my knowledge, Bush is only the President of the USA and not yet the Secretary-General of the UN."

"You have to strengthen the political philosophy on which the UN system is based, and to have actors decided that they should play their legitimate share in international decision-making. However, some actors are very vulnerable: the Soviet Union needs economic aid, investments, and capital, so you can buy its vote and its veto; China is in an identical situation. The rivalry between the UK and France often does not project an image of a cohesive Europe. It speaks with two different voices. Often British diplomacy's first aim is to topple the French initiatives and the French diplomacy's first task is to show that the British initiative is only British and not EEC. So the Americans

are in a very comfortable situation; how desirable that is, is a question of personal inclinations."

If the UN is the alternative, how in practical terms can power be transferred to the UN, given the economic strength of the US and the weakness of the USSR? Mr Safieh concluded. "This is where I think that the second pillar of the international system is no more the Soviet Union, but the EEC. Those other pillars of the international system have to become more assertive. Europe more cohesive, Japan more assertive. Now, with the renewed attempts for the quest for peace in the Middle East, Bush has the opportunity to play statesman, and that's the challenge. He played the policeman successfully. Will he play the role of the International Statesman?"

CHAPTER THREE

ON THE MADRID PEACE PROCESS

The presentation was delivered at a symposium sponsored by the Center for Policy Analysis on Palestine and held in Washington DC on November 12, 1991.

I sincerely do believe that Palestine is resurrecting, and as you know, we in the Holy Land have had some previous experience in resurrection.

The Palestinian people are one of the few peoples in the history of mankind that never got their legitimate share of sympathy, solidarity, and support. We have always attributed this to the fact that we have been in the Middle East, the victims of the victims of European history. In our crowded calendar, in our tormented Middle East, the date of December 9, 1987, will always be remembered as a regional historical turning point. The Intifada, which has been our cry for freedom out of captivity and bondage, was a turning point. It was an eye-opener. For the first time in Western public opinion, the perception of the Palestinians in this bipolar Israeli-Palestinian relationship started to be that of an oppressed and persecuted people who had an interest in the achievement of peace. Western public opinion then began to see us as the victimised party in this bipolar relationship. People started understanding our ceaseless quest for the achievement of peace, because we were the ones whose territory was totally occupied, whose people were living endlessly under either occupation or in forced diaspora-ization, whose land was being expropriated, whose water was being plundered, whose houses were being demolished, whose individuals were being deported, whose bones were being broken, and whose schools and universities were being closed. And I believe that this interest in the achievement of peace stems from and explains the fact that we in the PLO have been unreasonably reasonable in dealing with peace opportunities that have arisen lately.

I had the political privilege of accompanying Yasser Arafat in 1988 on several of his political trips. I was with him in September 1988 in Strasbourg when he addressed the European Parliament. I was with him again in Stockholm, then in Geneva in December 1988. Still ringing in my ears is the sentence he repeated on those occasions: "I extend my hand in peace, hoping that an Israeli De Gaulle will seize it." One had to wait endlessly to see that no De Gaulle emerged. Not even a DeKlerk, and a DeKlerk would have been good enough to start this snowball process.

In 1988, 1989 and 1990, there was already an American endeavour at peacemaking in the Middle East. The PLO and the Palestinian people were known to have been available for that exercise. We had welcomed the ten points of President Mubarnak, we had welcomed and were favourably inclined to the five points of Secretary of State Baker. At that time, the diplomatic equation was the following: we were hoping that the Israelis would accept them as a basis, while the Israelis were hoping that we would torpedo them. Any serious analysis of the endeavour of 1988-1990 would demonstrate that it

failed then because the American administration allowed the peace process to remain a hostage of the Israeli domestic political arena, as the Israelis had a very ethnocentric conception of peace-making. Some saw peace with us as a compromise formula halfway in between Likud and Labour. Even worse others saw it as a compromise halfway in between Shamir and Sharon. The Israeli government then was a national coalition government described by observers as a government of national paralysis which slumbered and fragmented over differing attitudes on how to respond to the Baker initiative. Shimon Peres made an attempt at coalition-building, failed, and Shamir came back to power with indispensable extreme right-wing coalition partners. The process then was temporarily interrupted by the US administration which had allowed the Israeli government to determine the ceiling of the possible and the permissible and had allowed the slowest actor to dictate the pace of the peace process. And as you know, a turtle compared to Shamir looks like Speedy Gonzales.

An accurate assessment of that period should be made so that we do not fall into the trap, once again, in our endeavour of 1991-1992. Why was the American attempt to bring the belligerent parties together at the negotiating table successful now? I for one believe that there were three major factors.

The first was the Gulf crisis and the Gulf War, which many thought was an unnecessary war, and during which, many thought that diplomacy was not given a serious chance to bring an equitable, acceptable solution to fruition. Yet, the fact that the Americans and their allies went into war to discipline a misbehaving regional actor made inactivity on the American side toward the other misbehaving regional actor – Israel – very un-understandable. And I believe the fact that Iraq was bombed back to the pre-industrial age was a factor that motivated the administration to show assertive dynamism toward that other unfinished business of Israel/Palestine. And, since no one was asking the administration to bomb Israel to a pre-industrial age, but just to exercise and exert some friendly persuasion to bring them to the negotiating table, that type of endeavour had started to be seen as possible. Inactivity on the part of the American administration toward that other misbehaving regional actor – Israel would have been very badly perceived from Morocco to Malaysia, because inactivity would have been seen as excessive patience, which resembles indulgence, which borders on complacency and complicity.

The second factor was the end of the Cold War and the end of the bipolar international system and their repercussions on the pattern of relations between the United States and Israel. I personally believe that Shamir is not yet fully aware of the changes that have intervened to alter the client-patron relations away from the model to which we all have grown accustomed for decades. Israel drew enormous advantage throughout the era of superpower rivalry and succeeded in convincing American policy-makers that it was capable of containing Soviet expansionism. As a result of that it received unlimited, unconditional and unquestioning support. Now that the United States is no longer obsessed with the containment of Soviet expansionism, we should put on the American agenda the containment of Israeli expansionism. Now that the Soviet Union has been rolled back from its East European acquisitions, we should put on the American agenda how to roll back Israel from its Middle Eastern acquisitions.

There were always two schools of thought competing for the explanation of the fascinating and intriguing American-Israeli relations. The “who wags whom” debate has occupied and preoccupied a generation of scholars. The first school spoke of an

American Israel, an Israel that is a sort of belligerent Sparta at the service of the contemporary Rome. For the adherents of that trend of thought it is the United States that dictates to its local ally what should be its regional policy in accordance with the US global vision. The second school projects the image of an Israeli America, a complex relationship where the global superpower simply adopts the regional policy of its client state and integrates it in its global strategy. This is seen as a result of powerful American domestic considerations where “Capitol Hill is that other Israeli occupied territory that needs to be liberated” if ever we are to have an even-handed approach toward the Middle East. Both of those schools of thought are accurate but at different moments in history depending on a variety of considerations like the strength (electoral and intellectual) of the American president, on how comfortable he is in the country and in Congress and on how comfortable the United States is in the world. I believe that now a new era is being ushered in where the strategic function, utility and *raison d'être* of Israel have been drastically diminished in American eyes. The fact that the Arab World, the Palestinians included, no longer challenges Israel's existence but only its expansions has further enhanced the possibilities of American pressure on the recalcitrant Israeli leadership.

The third factor is the following: It is no longer the 1950s and the 1960s, when the Arab World was governed by militant nationalist leaders. Whether one likes it or not, in a way the regional Arab system is a moderate conservative system, and Israel, by obstinately wanting to continue its occupation of the Palestinian and Arab territories, is defying, delegitimizing, and destabilising a regional system that is not being a nuisance to Western perceptions and interests. It is Israeli expansionism that today is emerging as a nuisance to American global and regional interests.

We went to Madrid, and I for one believe that history is in the making. I believe that there is an enormous window of opportunity, and we, the Palestinians, have been unreasonably reasonable in order to make Madrid possible. I believe that the pride of the Palestinian people, welcoming the return of the Palestinian negotiating team back into occupied Palestine, is proof that we the Palestinians genuinely desire peace, and I fully endorse the olive-branch strategy. Tomorrow the olive branch is by far more subversive than any other instrument of political expression.

We were not very comfortable with the scenario that was being offered to us. We were in favour of a peaceful resolution of the Middle East conflict, yet we thought and dreamt of an international conference sponsored by the United Nations, with the presence of the five permanent members of the Security Council, to implement and not to interpret the UN resolutions. That was not the negotiating process that all the belligerent parties were invited to. We felt uncomfortable, and we had many a legitimate reservation. Yet, because we had confidence in ourselves we accepted to undergo the test.

There is a need to clarify certain conceptual matters. I have always defined the Intifada as the gradual exercise of Palestinian sovereignty even under continued Israeli occupation, and I have always seen the Intifada as being more than stone-throwing. The Intifada is the parallel institution-building, it is the proliferation of popular committees that deal with all social needs, from education to medication, from culture to agriculture. I have always seen the Intifada as our attempt to recuperate from the occupying authority domains and spheres of decision-making that had been usurped by the occupying authority for so long. And I believe that this definition of the Intifada will prevail in the

coming weeks, months, and years. We have always said that it will be an Intifada only towards independence.

The other definition is that of the PLO. Some Israeli commentators like to say that the PLO was excluded from the process, yet I still remember Abba Eban, whom I have encountered in one or two symposia, saying that Mr Shamir, toward the PLO, had a very ostrich-like attitude. I still remember Abba Eban saying, in his particular manner, “and the ostrich posture is both uncomfortable and inelegant.”

What is the PLO? The PLO is more than an institution, it is an ideal. The idea is much stronger than the institution. It has always been our challenge, we in the PLO, to have an institution strong enough to carry the idea. If 10,000 Palestinians work in the institution, the five million Palestinians are the powerful vehicles of the idea. Israel constantly made a mistake: wanting to crush the idea, it attacked the institution, thus reinvigorating the idea. Just as the PLO represented the Palestinian people for 25 years, today the Palestinian people are representing the PLO, and they are doing a hell of a good job.

Despite all the constraints that were inflicted upon us, we succeeded in outsmarting those who were putting these capricious demands upon us. They tried to exclude East Jerusalemites, and there comes Faisal Husseini as political co-ordinator of the Palestinian team, and there comes Hanan Ashrawi as the visible and vocal tip of that iceberg as the Palestinian spokesperson, here comes Sari Nusseibeh as the technical scholarly co-ordinator of the negotiating team. And they are all prominent members of the Jerusalem community. They are Jerusalem. They wanted to exclude the diaspora, and here the PLO re-smuggles back into the process Rashid Khalidi, Camille Mansour, and Anis Al-Qasim. Among us there was no problem of who was at the table and who was in the adjacent room. As long as we have this mutual self-confidence it becomes of such banal importance, and we have succeeded in ridiculing the capricious exigence of the other side.

The battles ahead will not be easy. Looking at Israel – which is today rich in politicians and very poor in statesmen – I often think of Nahum Goldman, who in my opinion said in the middle of the 1970s three things relevant to our exercise today and tomorrow. Nahum Goldman in the middle of the 1970s, commenting critically on the Kissinger approach, said, “it seems to me that diplomacy in the Middle East is the art of delaying the inevitable as long as possible.” This definition was painfully accurate. For Nahum Goldman, already in the middle of the 1970s, the inevitable was the Palestinian dimension, the Palestinian factor, and the Palestinian actor. And tomorrow, the Israeli negotiating team will get on our nerves, and probably everybody else’s nerves, trying to delay the inevitable as long as possible, while we will be seeking historical shortcuts so that we can achieve peace, for their children and ours at the earliest possible moment.

Nahum Goldman said another thing in the middle of the 1970s that I think is extremely relevant today. He mentions in one of his books a discussion he had with Moshe Dayan, and he writes that he said. “Moshe, the Americans give you much aid and some advice. Up to now you take all the aid and you leave the advice aside. What would happen if ever they were to tell you, ‘You can only take the aid if you also take the advice’?” And according to Nahum Goldman, Moshe Dayan with resignation said, “Then we have also to take the advice”. And I believe there is a big historical lesson to be drawn from Nahum Goldman, who says, “Let’s make the linkage between the American aid and American advice.” And we hope that the American advice tomorrow

will be compatible with universal principles of human law, of international law. Our aspiration has always been to see an American administration that reconciles its power with its own principles.

The third thing that Nahum Goldman said, commenting on the disengagement agreements between Israel and Egypt and Israel and Syria, was that the Americans have a big reservoir of possibilities of leverage and pressure on Israel. And in his opinion they should not be wasted on marginal, peripheral issues of partial solutions, but to exercise the bulk, the capacity of this reservoir of pressure in order to obtain a solution on the crux, the central issue of controversy in the area. And I hope that tomorrow there will not be procedural battles on marginal issues, where the capital of possibilities of pressure will be wasted on a succession of small battles instead of being waged on the big battle, the central core issue.

I saw Mr Shamir on television say in Madrid that Israel had a hunger for peace. And I believe today that we the Palestinians can solemnly and publicly say we can satisfy Israel’s hunger for peace if ever Mr Shamir abandons his appetite for territory.

CHAPTER FOUR

ON JERUSALEM

Lecture given at a seminar organised by the Arab Research Center in 1994.

First of all, I would like to address my colleague on this panel, Mr. Michael Safier. Contrary to his anticipation, and maybe contrary to my habit, I will not be passionate and emotional but quietly factual. I fully agree with Professor Ibrahim Abu Lughod. The destiny of Jerusalem is surely totally tied to the fate and destiny of Palestine. The battle that took place in Palestine, all throughout the 20th century, aiming at reducing the majority into a demographic minority and propelling the minority into a demographic majority, that battle was also waged in and around Jerusalem but in an even more acute manner.

The municipality of Jerusalem was first established in the 19th century, during the Ottoman rule in Palestine, in 1863. The Municipal Council was then composed of five members: three Moslems, one Christian and one Jew. At the end of the 19th century, there was a small Jewish Community in Palestine of around 20,000 inhabitants and they were an integral part of the Palestinian social tissue. They were overwhelmingly anti-Zionist or non-Zionists. They thought that the penetration of Zionism in Palestine would complicate and poison inter-confessional relations and they also thought that Zionism would fail. History has proven them right on one point and wrong on the other. But by 1920-1921, coming from Russia but also mainly from Poland, massive arrivals of new Zionist immigrants numerically drowned this indigenous Jewish Community which became since then a shrinking minority within the growing Jewish Community.

In 1917, at the end of Ottoman domination in Palestine, the Jerusalem Municipal Council was composed of ten members: 6 Moslems, 2 Christians and 2 Jews. The British authorities nominated in 1918 a new council of 6 members: 2 Moslems, 2 Christians and 2 Jews. Until 1927, Arabic was the exclusive language for the deliberations of the Council's meetings.

In 1927 municipal elections were held to elect a Council of 12 members: 5 Moslems, 4 Jews and 3 Christians. The elections organised in 1934 brought again a Council of 12 members but its changed composition again reflected the alteration that had occurred in the demographic equilibrium of the city: 4 Moslems, 2 Christians and 6 Jews.⁽¹⁾

As a result of the 1948 war, Jerusalem city came out divided in two, with the Western side under Israeli control and the East side, including the Old City, under Jordanian rule. But contrary to widespread impression or perception, in 1948 West Jerusalem was not Jewish. The massacre of Deir Yassin – which is in the outskirts of West Jerusalem where 254 villagers were slaughtered and the blowing up of the Semiramise Hotel in West Jerusalem triggered the ethnic cleansing of West Jerusalem and of coastal Palestine. Menahem Begin, in the first edition of his memoirs in 1952 titled "The Revolt", boasts that Zionist forces after Deir Yassin "advanced like a knife in butter" with the Arab civilian population fleeing in panic. He was advised by more sophisticated and polished friends to remove that passage from other editions of his book. 64,000 Palestinians were driven out of West Jerusalem and the four villages in its immediate vicinity which were

later annexed to its municipality boundaries namely Lifta, Deir Yassin, Ein Karem and El Malha.

There were several Palestinian residential neighbourhoods in West Jerusalem where middle-class Palestinians, civil servants, lawyers, engineers and doctors lived and worked. To name just a few: Katamon, upper and lower Baqa'a – before 1948 my family lived in upper Baq'a Talbieh, Mamilla, Shama'a, Musrara, Abu Tor etc. Palestinians left with only the key to their houses and one of the sad jokes among Palestinians is that their country was taken . . . furnished. The late professor Henry Cattan has analysed in great depth the "legalised theft" that followed where all these real estate properties were declared "absentee property".

In today's value, all these properties would amount to billions of dollars, since Jerusalem and its immediate surroundings would be the Mayfair and the Park Lane of any global monopoly game.

Property ownership in West Jerusalem was (and is) as follows: 40% of West Jerusalem was privately Palestinian owned, 26% was Jewish owned and the rest belonged to the Moslem Awqaf (Moslem Trust), to the different Christian Churches and to the Government of Palestine.

Let me just give a few examples as to what happened after the dispersion and dispossession of the Palestinians in 1948⁽²⁾.

The Hilton and the Sonesta Hotels are now built on the property of Lifta village (since then annexed to the municipal boundaries of West Jerusalem). So are the Knesset, the Prime Minister's office, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Interior. The Israeli Knesset is built on the property of the Khalaf family from Lifta now residing in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah which was annexed after the 1967 war which makes the Khalaf family very "present absentees". But no one ever thought of compensating them.

I share Michael Safier's hope that in a not too distant future there will be on one hill of Jerusalem the Israeli Knesset and on another hill the Palestinian Parliament. They will have two features in common. Both would have been democratically elected and both would have been built . . . on Palestinian land.

The houses in the centre of Deir Yassin – the second of the villages vacated by Palestinians and annexed by the West Jerusalem Municipality – are used today as an Israeli sanatorium for the mentally ill run by the Ministry of Health.

The Israeli Hadassa hospital is built on Ein Karem lands; so is Yad Vashem the memorial for the Jewish victims of Nazism.

The stadium of West Jerusalem is built on the El Malha village and so is the recently opened Jerusalem Mall.

The Israeli Independence Park is on a Moslem cemetery in the Mamilla neighbourhood where also a superb building, owned by the Moslem Awqaf, and which housed in the 1930's the first Palestinian theatre, has been transformed into the Israeli Ministry of Trade and Industry.

I could continue endlessly . . .

On the eve of the 1967 war, the West Jerusalem Municipality was composed of 37,000 dunums. The war ended, one of the first decisions of the Israeli Government was to dismiss the Arab Municipal Council of East Jerusalem headed by Mr. Rouhi Al Khatib who was then deported to Amman and to annex East Jerusalem and much of its surroundings, up north to Ramallah and down south to Bethlehem. East Jerusalem was

with even greater acceleration, we have to note that the more recent the Jewish immigrant the more radical he/she is. During my visit to Jerusalem I was harassed twice by settlers. One happened to be a recent immigrant from Latvia, the other from Brooklyn, New York. The most brutal coercers of the Palestinians today are the Falashas in the Israeli army.

The point raised by Leila Fanous concerns Palestinian return. I have just come back from a visit to Jerusalem after more than a quarter of a century. Of the 36 pupils of my promotion-class of 1966 in the College des Freres, only three are still in Jerusalem and the 33 others are scattered literally in the four corners of the world. The age category of the 30-50 year olds is almost non-existent in Jerusalem. It is as if society has simply skipped one generation. Most were in my case abroad to pursue university studies in 1967 when East Jerusalem was occupied, annexed and a demographic census conducted. We became legally non-existent. In 1968, I applied for family reunification but I was offered instead a tourist visa, for one month, non-extendable, on condition that I show my return ticket before I am allowed in Jerusalem. Involved in student politics – and then was the golden era of student politics – even a new tourist visa became impossible.

I personally believe that our struggle will grow increasingly non-military but will remain equally as challenging if not more challenging and demanding. Up to now we have paid the price of the peace process: Israel has rehabilitated itself internationally, it has renewed diplomatic relations with almost all countries, and funds and investments are pouring in. The peace process and the new ambience created allow us now to start visiting our homeland. Visiting as a first step. It can become an unstoppable bulldozer. Some say, I won't go back unless and until the situation has changed. My answer is that the situation won't change unless and until we start going back. There is going to be a battle for Jerusalem. It is of a demographic nature, and of an institutional nature. We should practice our beliefs. We believe in the indivisible nature of the Palestinian people and, from now on, we should achieve enhanced Palestinian – Palestinian – Palestinian co-operation in all fields, meaning the Palestinians of the diaspora, the emerging Palestinian entity, and Israeli Palestinians. For example a Palestinian publisher in London can have the books he publishes printed in Jerusalem. It has economic rationality – much cheaper – but also political and strategic significance; that of energising the Palestinian economy. The struggle in Palestine has been: "whose demography on whose geography?" and we should spare no effort in creating job opportunities for all those still there and, even further, to integrate returning Palestinians. Palestinian refugees now living in the periphery of Amman, Damascus, Beirut and Sidon should not be expected to come back and live in the periphery of Nablus and Hebron. Only a dynamic economy can integrate large numbers of returnees as full partners and participants in the new society and new political entity. I am personally very unhappy and unsatisfied with our political under-development. I believe we neither have the establishment or institutions we deserve nor do we have the opposition we need. Working at improving both is a very worthy task. For better strategic planning we need better of both.

Michael Safier used a word I frequently resort to in my parallel discourse: Cosmopolitan. Yet I am not sure we give the same meaning to that concept. The Palestinian people is an Arab people whose culture is Arab and Islamic. They include a small but dynamic Christian minority. At the crossroads of three continents it has been historically an outward orientated society. Having Holy Places for the three monotheistic

religions has put it in daily contact with the outside world and the world daily comes to Jerusalem. For a variety of reasons, Palestinian society today is one of the best equipped to reconcile harmoniously authenticity and modernity, specificity and universality. Jerusalem has been, and should be the centre of gravity of cultural cross-fertilisation and of the dialogue of civilisations. It is there that we can move beyond confrontation towards authentic reconciliation. Yet I do not believe that Zionism and settlement building have enriched the cosmopolitan tissue and texture of society in Jerusalem. Being exclusivist and expulsionist it has rather impoverished Jerusalem.

Religion: I am totally foreign to any attempt to give this conflict religious connotations. I have always been exasperated by the use, misuse and abuse of religion in political struggles.

The intrusion of religion in political debates has always exacerbated tensions. Anyway God is usually innocent of the behaviours/misbehaviour of those who pretend to be guided or inspired by him/her.

Uri Davis addressed the issue of settlement and settlers. There are four categories of settlers: the security settlers, the ideological settlers, the ecological settlers and the economic settlers. The security settlers were put in place just after the 1967 war in what was designated as strategic locations. Military experts now consider them to be more a security liability rather than a strategic asset. The economic settlers are the ones who were enticed and attracted by economic incentives, cheaper housing, credit facilities etc. The ecological settlers are mainly yuppies, young professionals who were seeking unpolluted areas out of West Jerusalem or Tel Aviv and an "apartment with a view" on the Dead Sea or the Judean Desert. The ideological settlers, the most aggressive of the four categories are the religious-motivated settlers who believe that the Palestinians are the contemporary "Amaleks" of the Bible that God wishes to see expelled or exterminated.

I personally believe that leaving the settlers is a recipe for failure and disaster. They have settled in Occupied Territories in total defiance of the International Community and of International Law. Their continued presence is not only wrong legally and ethically but also pragmatically. They have declared openly that they are organising in an underground para-military organisation. They will have one of two types of behaviours, if not both, like the OAS and the French *pieds-noirs* of Algeria. They will either go into Palestinian neighbourhoods to provoke tension and friction feeding the spiral of violence or hope to be beaten so as to project of themselves the image of an endangered species reinviting the Israeli army back if and when it had withdrawn. The Israeli society and leadership have to face the fact that the settlers do not represent the most adorable segment of Israeli society and they are hardly the best equipped to be the bridge for future harmonious relations. After the emergence of the Palestinian entity, individual Israelis can apply, through normal institutional channels, for residing in Palestinian territory. Yet I do not think that anyone who wants to pray in a shrine of religious significance has to settle beside it. My family, we go to Rome and to the Vatican and then we move along, without expressing any claim, though we believe we are the descendants of the early Christians, those who were sent to the circus to amuse the mob and feed the lions. I mention that because some invoke suffering as a valid argument for territorial claims.

Gayth Armanazi raised the issue of how to move from A to B. It is "the question" still begging for an answer. Having taken part in a variety of diplomatic encounters or

academic seminars. I have realised that diplomacy is not an exercise in intellectual seduction. It is a confrontation of wills within the framework of a certain *rapport de force* where every advantage is taken of any disequilibrium of power. I believe if the local belligerent parties are left to themselves – as is the case now – they will never achieve an acceptable compromise. I have supported the Oslo agreement “*faute de mieux*”, as the least unattractive of a set of very unattractive alternatives.

Mr. Chairman, I belong to a minority school of thought that advocates “an elegantly imposed solution – if need be inelegantly – from the outside that is mutually unacceptable”. Bearing in mind the pathology of conflict and the psychology of the belligerents, I believe that “mutually unacceptable” carries more potential than the concept of mutual acceptability. Since both societies tend to believe that Mandatory Palestine is totally theirs, the Two-State solution should be the solution aimed at hoping that both States will opt in the future for vertical expansion rather than horizontal expansions one at the detriment of the other. This will not be a just peace but it will be just acceptable. Anyway the Palestinians have resigned themselves to aim at possible justice rather than absolute justice.

I personally am in favour of an interventionist United Nations body. I believe that in our contemporary international system – and I prefer international system to world order because the concept of order has moral connotations that the system totally lacks – UN supremacy is the only possible substitute to American hegemony. During the last three decades international pressure was exerted on the Arab side to reduce their demands. We had to discover that there were three layers in political expectations: the desirable, the possible and the acceptable. We had to discover that not everything desirable was possible, not everything possible was acceptable. As a consequence we had to reconcile our national rights with the international will.

The same pressures have now to be exercised on the Israeli side. I am revolted by the self-inflicted impotence of the major external actors when dealing with the Middle East. Palestinian decision-making has to take place in the most uncomfortable political environment. We have to constantly bear in mind: (1) Arab impotence, (2) the decline, then the demise of the Soviet Union, (3) the abdication of Europe for a geo-strategic role, (4) the paralysis of the UN, (5) the total alignment of the US on every capricious Israeli preference, priority or policy. External pressure will be most helpful to the most advanced or enlightened Israeli politicians who are now hostages to a public opinion that they have once helped to fanatise. Anyway, peace in the Middle East is too important to be left to the Israelis alone to decide upon. But, for the moment, given the givens, they believe that they can set the ceiling of the possible and of the permissible. That they can dictate the pace of progress of the peace process: extremely slowly.

CHAPTER FIVE

THOSE WERE THE DAYS

Speech delivered on the occasion of the inaugural session of the Global Festival celebrating the Centenary Year of The London School of Economics at the invitation of the Student Union – Monday, 6th February 1995.

Ladies & Gentlemen

Of the many duties I have had to undertake here in London during the last four years, your invitation today will probably be the one I will remember, in the future, with the greatest tenderness and affection.

Having been successively, some two decades ago, president of both the Belgian, then the French, sections of the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS), your invitation has plunged me in nostalgic recollections of what is supposed to have been the golden age of the international student movement: from Berkeley to Belgium and Berlin, from Paris to Prague.

Those were the days, my friends, when we reinvented the world and the future almost every day. Voracious readers, we used to engage in sleepless nights and endless talk about the ideal society. Some of us were ready to die in bringing about their ideals. Others wanted simply to live them. Schools of thought proliferated and they all revolved around the idea of social change and – yes, already then – a new international system. Some thought change in the centre would be decisive while others considered changes in the periphery to be the recommended course of action. Some regarded the working classes in the industrialised nations to be the major agents of change while others looked upon the peasantry of the Third World as the vehicle of social transformation. Some argued that the State, which had to become a neutral body based on meritocracy, will assume this function by being the guarantor, the regulator and the redistributor within society while Herbert Marcuse, one of my generation’s favourite authors flattered our egos with his theory that in our contemporary society, where we witness the embourgeoisement of the proletariat and the continuing conservatism of the peasantry, students, and only the students, were the sole agent of the desirable change. Students, those future intellectuals, were a topic Antonio Gramsci had addressed with great eloquence. Advocating a special relationship between the oppressed and the intelligentsia he called for “an alliance between those who think because they suffer and those who suffer because they think”.

So we thought and thought and I am sure that our elders must have suffered when hearing us think aloud. But that is altogether another story.

Our slogans then reflected “*l’air du temps*”:

- “*L’imagination au pouvoir*”.
- “*Le droit à la différence*”. The right to be different.
- “*Il est interdit d’interdire*”. It is forbidden to forbid.

A favourite among many was:

“Le droit à la paresse”. The right to be lazy, which incidentally referred to the legitimacy and desirability of general strikes rather than the appealing notion of *dolce vita* based on *fare niente*.

“Il faut s’occuper de la politique sinon la politique s’occupera de vous”. You should take care of politics or else politics will take care of you.

And the last that I will quote:

“Politics is too important to be left to politicians”.

Each of us had his or her heroes and maître(s) a penser. Some became dogmatic and doctrinaire. But great intellectual diversity and tolerance was the major feature of those times. I was, what we used then to call, eclectic, belonging to no chapel, no clique or clan. Because of my historical and sociological background, Jesus and Mohammed had undeniable influence on my intellectual upbringing. The principles of “liberté-fraternité-égalité” and the French Revolution itself had exercised a great fascination on me. As a Palestinian who favoured Arab unity, I showed an early interest in Bismarck, Cavour and Garibaldi, Jamal Abdel Nasser but also in Jean Monnet. I read Marx, in depth, and never became a Marxist myself yet had often to protect him from frequent misinterpretations, distortions and mutilations of some of his disciples just as many of us have frequently to proclaim God’s innocence of beliefs and behaviours perpetrated on His/Her behalf. Let us not forget that Jewish fundamentalists have transformed God into some sort of real estate agent.

I devoted much time to Lenin and Mao, finishing an MA thesis in the very Catholic University of Louvain in Belgium – in fact the oldest Catholic University in the world established in 1425 – on “Revolutionary strategies and the conquest of power, a comparative study of the Bolshevik and Maoist revolutions”, yet had a special weakness towards those who encountered a tragic fate: Che Guevara, J.F.K. and Martin Luther King, or were maltreated by History and by their contemporaries: Leon Trotsky or had conquered power only to abandon it voluntarily: Emiliano Zapata.

To add to the irritation of some of my friends, I remained totally unseduced and unmoved by the Chinese cultural revolution and openly preferred Chou en lai the State-builder, the technocrat to the unattractive and constantly intriguing manipulative agitator Lui Piao.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this list would be incomplete if I were to omit my obsession with and observation of De Gaulle, this Western leader that Stanley Hoffman had called “un artiste de la politique”. He had had to struggle, brilliantly, against foes and friends alike to maintain the rank of France undiminished after its devastating defeat in 1940. The analogy with the Palestinian re-emerging national movement would not have escaped you. His tumultuous relationship with that other giant – Winston Churchill – would keep me awake night after night. Churchill had summarised this complex rapport by saying: “of the many crosses I have had to carry, the Cross of Lorraine was surely the heaviest”. (The Cross of Lorraine being, of course, the symbol of the French Resistance). Again, regional analogies were obvious.

My fascination with De Gaulle was responsible for some of my most tormenting moments. I was, then, in total solidarity with the French student movement but this movement was irreparably destabilising De Gaulle. Anyway, even his abdication was done with such grandeur that his place in history – undiminished and unstained – was preserved for prosperity.

In 1972, I moved from Belgium to the Institut d’Etudes Politiques in Paris and got

involved in discussions on the nature and the scope of Political Science itself. Some of you present here today would remember that as a relatively new discipline Political Science was still struggling to assert itself and its domaine. So we still called it then “Political Sciences”, in the plural, seeing it as a sort of interdisciplinary field, it is true dealing with the study of the State, of Government and of power in general, but encompassing History, International Relations, Sociology and Economics with very unclear demarcation lines. In Anglo-Saxon countries they had no problem describing students of and experts in political science: a political scientist, but in the French-speaking world even that was subject for debate and dissent. Some called him/her a “politiste”, others preferred “politologue” yet others favoured “politologue”. The jokers would simply say “les sciences poseurs”.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this was the flavour of those times. We were then young and audacious, questioning everything and everyone. We were the world “en miniature” with an experimental “global village” mentality. We were one, yet, in every sense, plural. We shared values and dreams and were endeavouring hard to reconcile our respective cultural authenticities with what we thought was modernity, to reconcile our respective political specificities with what we hoped was universality. Universality for us was surely not the American way of life or Western hegemony but an elusive and yet to be defined constellation of ideas and values enriched by the many inputs of every culture and civilisation. I am sure that the quest for “that universality” still goes on today in this university and elsewhere too.

Yes, we were one and plural: proud nationalists, profoundly internationalists, totally cosmopolitan. With the student movement on the ascendancy, catalysed by the Vietnamese tragedy, the 1967 war took place in the Middle East resulting in the humiliating defeat of the Arab armies and the Palestinian reawakening. Israel, in a continuing process of elastic expansion, dispossession and dispersion, occupied East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza in addition to the Sinai and the Golan. A whole generation of Palestinian students were trapped abroad and when Israel conducted a demographic census, we all became legally non-existent. This student community became the new wandering Palestinians. Many of us were already active in resurrecting the Palestinian National Movement around Yasser Arafat and his colleagues. Now most joined in, becoming a major affluent within the PLO.

Already in those days many of our friends were Jews. They were anti-Zionists or non-Zionists. The West, then, was a cemetery for those in politics, in the media or in academia who dared question Israel’s intentions or dare condemn its policies and practices. Reputations were ruined, careers were shattered and character assassination was the name of the game. Israel felt immune to criticism and the most unacceptable intellectual terrorism prevailed, as a powerful deterrent. Philippe de St Robert wrote that he received a letter from one of his readers saying “you are an objective writer but when Israel is concerned impartiality is unwelcomed”. So some of the best critical books or articles were then mainly written by Jewish scholars. But even they would not escape insults and abuse. “Self-hating Jews” would be one of the mildest. The most radical among them would question the very legitimacy of the Zionist enterprise in Palestine while the more moderate believed that the creation of a Palestinian State was a Jewish moral obligation, a Jewish ethical responsibility. I still remember, with enormous political gratitude, Rabbi Elmer Berger, Alfred Lilenthal of “What price Israel?” and of course Naomi Chomsky in the USA. In Belgium, Marcel Liebman and Nathan

Wienstock. In France Ania Francos, Ilan Halevy and Maxime Rodinson and what was then the highly needed eye-opener in intellectual circles his "Israel: a colonial settler State". In the UK, Eli Lobel, Moshe Machover, Uri Davis and Isaac Deutscher. Deutscher in his criticism of the "Prussians of the Middle East" offered a parable of his own to make comprehensible the human dimensions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Putting aside the calculations of politicians and the machinations of states, he said that this conflict was between a person who had to jump from a building on fire but landed on another person whose back he broke. Each time the second person moaned in pain or tried to stand up again, he would receive a beating for fear of revenge or claims for compensation.

A prominent French Jewish intellectual visited Israel during those years and returned profoundly disturbed by the arrogance and the macho military mentality he encountered. I will never forget his remark then: "These Israelis are no more Jews".

"These Israelis are no more Jews", an interesting statement that deserves one day some further elaboration.

Ladies and Gentlemen, rightly or wrongly, we were then considered a generation of adorable or of exasperating dreamers, rightly or wrongly, the generations who followed were perceived as more disciplined, more career-orientated. But there were a few exceptions, among others the Palestinian students of the West Bank and Gaza who played a leading role during the first years of the Intifada. They were models of self sacrifice to whom the entire nation is eternally indebted.

Some decades ago, Daniel Bell followed by Raymond Aron predicted "the end of ideologies". Years later, the end of history itself was announced to which Andre Fontaine, in a beautifully worded article in *Le Monde*, responded by saying: "if it is true that we witness the end of history, then we are living the beginning of boredom".

The way you have decided to celebrate the 100th anniversary of your Alma Mater, the theme – Globalism – that you have chose for the centenary festival, proves that we are not, definitely not, witnessing the end of idealism.

CHAPTER SIX

THE ROLE OF THIRD PARTIES

Speech delivered at the Annual Dinner, Medical Aid for Palestinians, Park Lane Hotel, London on Thursday May 23, 1996.

*The keynote speaker was Secretary of State
the Rt. Hon. Malcolm Rifkind MP.*

Secretary of State
Excellencies
My Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a privilege for me to be invited to speak again at MAP's annual dinner. A very successful British-Palestinian charity. To us all, MAP is a constant reminder that politics is not only about power but mainly about people. Throughout the years, your annual gathering has undeniably become a major social event for the Arab community in London and for their British friends. Our presence here tonight is a tribute to the remarkable work undertaken by MAP's dedicated staff and volunteers. Allow me today to single out one individual: the late Dr Riad Khereishi. Riad incarnated MAP's spirit and philosophy. His love and devotion for his country and his community were unparalleled and I will always regret that my arrival in London coincided with his physical decline depriving me prematurely of his valuable advice and guidance. I can still remember how during his last weeks he would frequently drag himself painfully to my office to share with me in his own way, his political testament of lessons drawn from his active and eventful life.

Today, all our wishes for success go to Saida Nuseibeh and I am fully confident that she will be faithful to a distinguished and long family tradition in public service.

Ladies and Gentlemen, today's event takes place a few weeks after the outrageous aggression against the Lebanese people, a few days before the Israeli general elections, 10 days before President Yasser Arafat's visit to the United Kingdom, and a few weeks before restarting decisive negotiations on final status.

For us, Arabs, there will always be "before Qana" and an "after Qana". From 1948 until April 1996, Arab casualties were at best simply figures, just numbers that would even sometimes go unmentioned as though they were faceless, nameless, fatherless, motherless, childless . . . worthless. Whether there is one mankind or different kinds of men and women seems to be an issue that has not yet received an adequate answer. In interviews with the Israeli weekly, *Kol Ha'ir*, Israeli soldiers were quoted saying that they had no regrets over killing more than 100 civilians sheltering in a United Nations base because the dead, they said, "were just a bunch of Arabs". To raise morale apparently, a commander gathered his troops after the shelling and told them "anyway

there are millions of them", them being "Arabushim", a Hebrew derogatory term which, fortunately has no English equivalent.

How often have we heard: "this time Israel has shot itself in the foot?" But it seems that Israel has many more than two feet to shoot at since miraculously it keeps getting away with almost anything.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we should spare no effort in conveying the message that we are definitely not children of a lesser God and that our tears and blood do also count.

In the midst of horror in Lebanon, Prime Minister Shimon Peres, paradoxically our partner in peace, in his attempt to prove to the Israeli electorate that he is not unlike his predecessor Rabin, he started to resemble General Sharon. One is tempted to say "with a dove like that, who needs hawks". If I speak with passion it is because we, the Palestinians, have a special bond with the Lebanese people. We are greatly indebted to Lebanon for having carried with us the burden of our national resurrection.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have no doubt that the Israeli political class left, right and centre – and the Israeli public at large – aspire to achieve peace, yet it seems to me that they still, to varying degrees wish it to be a reflection of Israeli intransigence. American alignment, European abdication, Russian decline, Arab impotence and, as a result . . . Palestinian resignation. How this peace is expected to be lasting, durable, final permanent, I have difficulties to comprehend. And I dare not utter the words brave, honourable, equitable, just, or even just acceptable.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Israel will be ill-advised if it were to confuse Palestinian realism with resignation and it is high time that the Israeli society underwent a much-needed soul-searching exercise, an ethical debate revolving around "what price Israel?" – about the human and political cost paid by us the Palestinian people, individually and collectively since four generations.

Israel was supposed to be an answer to what was called the "Jewish question". As a result we became the Palestinian question, a problem that awaits an equitable and satisfactory answer. I have not despaired yet that one day, hopefully soon, our people will hear expressions of remorse that will help pave the way for authentic reconciliation. Such an ethical undertaking seems indispensable if we are to move away from power politics, military preponderance and regional hegemony.

Such a soul-searching exercise is today possible because Israel is in a strategically comfortable situation. It enjoys nuclear monopoly in the area with all that this exclusivity implies. It has overwhelming conventional superiority vis-a-vis any possible Arab coalition. And thirdly it enjoys an "unwritten alliance" with the only remaining superpower which seems to be more advantageous than a formal written alliance since it does not require responsible behaviour from the junior partner that can freely operate as an "undisciplined ally".

Ladies and Gentlemen, a sovereign independent state is undeniably a Palestinian right. It is also an Israeli duty, an Israeli moral obligation, a Jewish ethical responsibility.

Today the electoral victory of Shimon Peres seems to be an international concern. To that effect Peres was offered a spectacular summit in Sharm El-Sheikh which was diverted and hijacked from its initial purpose. He was offered excessive understanding towards the multiple closures inflicted on Palestinian areas literally strangulating the society and the economy. He was offered embarrassed silence during the initial phases of aggression on Lebanon and, in spite of all that, he was offered a warm reception at the White House where . . . shared values were again stressed. Some might even

interpret my heavy-handed criticism of Peres as a modest but subtle contribution to help him rally right-wing undecided voters.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have my doubts on whether a policy aiming only at helping Peres translates necessarily in support of the peace we all aspire to see achieved. Shimon Peres has a tendency to believe that he can set the parameters of the possible and of the permissible. The transitional agreements were accepted only because of their temporary nature. I hope that after Israeli elections negotiations on final status will start in a new mood, a new environment, a new mentality.

I personally believe that the best way, today, to support the peace process is to have major actors of our contemporary international system send an unequivocal, unambiguous message to Israeli public opinion, preferably now in an election period, that whoever they elect on May 29 is expected to comply with certain internationally accepted principles and abide by internationally adopted resolutions. Such an international attitude will help liberate the Israeli political class from a hostage situation vis-a-vis a public opinion that they helped fanatise throughout the last decades. In that way, the Israeli voters will express their preference on May 29 on the basis of the experience or inexperience of the candidates, their charisma or its absence and socio-economic policies and not on how much land and peace they are willing to condescendingly restore to their legitimate owners. Peace is too important to be left to the Israelis alone to decide upon. The "Oslo Channel" should encourage external actors for a more decisive, visible and assertive role. If the Oslo connection has not yet put Palestine fully on the map, it has, for sure, put . . . Norway on the map.

Secretary of State, we feel privileged to have you among us today. For us Palestinians, the United Kingdom is a very important interlocutor. You were the Mandatory Power in Palestine present, to say the least, at the creation of the Palestinian problem. You are a permanent member of the Security Council of the UN and we are not resigned to its total absence in our quest for peace. You are a major pillar of the European Union and enjoy special relations with Washington where you have often played the role of an inspiring Athens to what seems frequently as an unsophisticated contemporary Rome.

With all these factors in mind, President Yasser Arafat will come to London early next month.

Secretary of State, we have a dream. A dream only you can make come true. A dream of a Rifkind Declaration. A Declaration that takes the lead in spelling out support for Palestinian aspirations and Palestinian rights. A Declaration that addresses the principles, conditions and contours of the desirable peace.

I know, some sceptics, some cynics, might say that Britain in this *fin de siecle* is not what it used to be at the turn of the century, but I am sure that British public opinion will "view with favour" that Britain again "punches above its weight".

CHAPTER SEVEN

HISTORICAL OR TERRITORIAL COMPROMISE?

*Preface to the booklet by Mr Ibrahim Mattar:
The Transformation of Jerusalem 1948-1997*

The Israeli government seems to believe that the peace process is the continuation of war . . . by other means. The drive towards the rampant annexation of the occupied territories is pursued relentlessly making the coming negotiations on final status simply meaningless.

Land for peace and UN Security Council resolution 242 are the basis of the current peace process. For the Arab side, Palestinians included, the desirable historical compromise between the belligerent parties meant that in exchange of Israeli withdrawal from the 1967 expansion, recognition will be bestowed on Israeli existence in its pre-1967 boundaries. This is the historical compromise that is on offer and it meets all the requirements that were expected from the Arab side to establish a durable comprehensive peace.

Israeli successive governments prefer the concept of territorial compromise. With that concept in mind, they consider the West Bank (and the occupied Golan) as disputed land and propose to meet us half way . . . somewhere in between Jerusalem and Jericho. On the other hand, the Arabs consider Mandatory Palestine to be the disputed area and propose to meet the Israelis along the 4th June 67 frontiers and nowhere else but in Jerusalem. The Israelis repeat constantly that all Jerusalem is their internal capital and that it is not negotiable because it is at the heart of the Jewish people. Real peace and authentic reconciliation necessitate the Israeli public opinion to admit finally that we too happen to have a memory, a history and a heart and that Jerusalem is at its centre.

Former Secretary of State Malcolm Rifkind, in a detailed speech on May 23, 1996 declared: "As is well known, Britain made clear many years ago, as did the international community, that it considered Israel to be in military occupation of East Jerusalem and to have only de facto authority over West Jerusalem."

His Holiness Pope John Paul II, the Archbishop of Canterbury Dr. George Carey and the Secretary General of the World Council of Churches, Dr. Conrad Raizer, all three have declared in the most responsible manner, that in Jerusalem there are two national aspirations to be satisfied and three religious rights to be respected. They are surely not intruding outsiders as a regrettable editorial of the Times seemed to imply in a very questionable article that endorsed blindly and vehemently, in the best (or worst) inquisitional tradition, a narrow Judeo-centred interpretation of the past and vision for the future.

The Palestinians and the Arabs, Islam and Christianity will never accept Jewish monopoly and hegemony in and over Jerusalem. Sharing Jerusalem is our goal and that

of the international community. It is not the international community that has aligned itself on our position, but we were the ones who have moved gradually, since 1973, towards the international consensus.

CHAPTER EIGHT

FROM BREAKTHROUGH TO BREAKDOWN?

[Transcript of a lecture given at Harvard University in April, 1997]

Deciding on titles for lectures is an interesting and intriguing affair. Speaking at MIT in 1986, at a moment of diplomatic stagnation, the title I gave to my talk then was: "Dead ends?" A friend later told me that the question mark after dead ends was my only concession to optimism. Years later, in May 1994, lecturing in California at the invitation of the World Affairs Council, I opted for: "Palestine: A State in the making?" and then the question mark seemed as my only reluctant concession to pessimism.

During the Napoleonic wars which devastated Continental Europe, the Swiss had a wise saying: "Les peuples heureux n'ont pas distoire", Happy peoples have no History. Well in Palestine/Israel, both peoples concerned are blessed or burdened and plagued with too much history. I still remember when Fukuyama wrote his article and then published the book: "The end of history", Andre Fontaine, the editor-in-chief of *Le Monde* in Paris, wrote in his regular column: "if we really live the end of history, then we are witnessing the beginning of boredom". Bearing in mind that "may you live in interesting times" is a curse in China, you can imagine how often and how hard we sometimes yearn for a . . . boring moment.

Chou-en-lai, China's Prime Minister for decades, was extremely worried by the then widely acclaimed Detente of the late sixties/ early seventies. He feared both American-Soviet collision but also American-Soviet collusion that might result in a world condominium. In his own inimitable way, he, the blase statesman would warn: "detente is like a bed but where each makes a different dream." Today the same could be said of the Middle East peace process. Everybody is in favour of peace of course. Majorities in each constituency support the peace process, but, like in Chou-en-lai's detente, each player has a different finality in mind, where visions for end-results are competing and incompatible and the dreams of one side can be a nightmare for others.

When Labour was still in power in Israel, I often repeated that it seemed to me that in this peace process, we, the Palestinians, were interested in peace but that the Israeli side seemed more interested in the process itself. To-day, with Netanyahu and the Likud presiding over an extreme right-wing coalition, I believe that we neither have peace nor do we have a process anymore.

Let me retrace briefly important landmarks. After the end of the Gulf war in 1991, the USA could not remain inactive towards what former British Secretary of State Douglas Hurd had called the "unfinished business", namely the unresolved Israeli-Arab conflict.

From March up to October, 1991, Secretary of State James Baker undertook multiple trips to the area in what I called then negotiating pre-negotiations leading to pre-negotiating negotiations. It was an exercise of shuttle diplomacy dealing with talks about talks.

Years earlier, both at the think-tank in Washington close to the Israeli lobby AIPAC and in the American magazine *Commentary*, abundant literature on conflict resolution in the Middle

East was produced with the following recommendations emphasised: (1) With the decline of the Soviet Union and of communism, Islam and fundamentalism were the new global threat and in those new changing realities, Israel maintains an important strategic function as the regional ally; (2) The Palestinian question should not be given centrality in any quest for peace. The Arab countries should not be invited as a bloc to negotiate with Israel but as individual actors with different sets of priorities and concerns; (3) Israel should be enticed into a peace process by carrots normalisation with non-neighbouring Arab countries, economic dividends etc. – rather than the stick. Israel was to be encouraged by rewards rather than sanctions; (4) The UN and other third parties should have as limited a role as possible leaving the diplomatic outcome to emanate from the interaction of the local belligerent parties that would become negotiating partners. The international ramifications of the conflict were to be sized down to regional proportions and, even further, to a local dimension.

The team around James Baker had all worked in that think-tank, the Washington Institute for Near East policies, and their motto was: "we should make an offer to Israel that it cannot reject". So they simply adopted Israel's preferred negotiating strategy and made it their own. The choreography of negotiations starting in Madrid end of October 1991 was to be extremely complex with multiple bilateral tracks coupled with several multilateral talks.

In the aftermath of the Gulf war, the Orient was literally disoriented. Advantage was to be made out of Arab disarray. Minimum levels of co-ordination were lacking and Israel did not hesitate to take advantage of the difficulty in synchronising positions and progress in the different tracks.

In any negotiation, the nature of the forum, the nature and the number of the participants determines the possible outcome. Instead of an "International Conference" under UN auspices, we all were invited to a "Peace Conference" with the USA and the rapidly vanishing USSR as co-sponsors. The UN was expected to be and to remain a silent observer and the European Community, that hoped and the Arabs supported that aspiration to be a co-sponsor playing a decisive role in the birth of a future Middle Eastern constellation, was relegated to a financial- economic role on the margin of the geo-strategic sphere kept jealously as the domain reserve of the Americans.

As we all remember, the Palestinians were offered to be half a delegation, representing half the people and seeking half a solution. Taking pretext that the Israeli government would not negotiate with the PLO and that it was also opposed to the emergence of a Palestinian State, the Palestinians were offered to sit in a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation. The Palestinian participants were supposed to be recruited from the West Bank and the Gaza strip only but no Jerusalem residents or diaspora Palestinians or PLO officials could be admitted in the negotiating room. The fact that it was the PLO leadership which selected the Palestinian negotiators and gave them legitimacy and instructions made former Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban say: "Whether he likes it or not, Shamir is negotiating with the PLO, but he prefers to adopt the ostrich posture which is neither a comfortable nor an elegant posture". By seeking half a solution I mean that, unlike the other tracks, we were expected to negotiate a five-year interim transitional period of Palestinian self-government on the road to final status. The more difficult issues – Jerusalem, the refugees, the settlements, boundaries and sovereignty were deferred to a second phase starting no later than the beginning of the third year.

I have often described the Palestinian attitude then as being unreasonably reasonable and that not only because we are angelic but because peace, and peace now, corresponds to our enlightened national interest. Any loss of time is extremely detrimental for us. We are the

ones whose land is being confiscated, whose water is being plundered, whose individuals are being deported, whose houses are being demolished, whose trees are being uprooted, whose universities and schools are being closed, whose economy is being strangulated. . . . Yet we went to Madrid with great expectations in spite of all the flawed and humiliating conditions since we were led to believe that this was the only game in town. From March to October 1991, we carried all the burden of momentum, all the burden of flexibility, because we wanted to give peace a chance hoping that Madrid would trigger a snowball process.

On the other hand, Israeli Prime Minister Shamir had to be dragged reluctantly and grudgingly to the negotiating table. He had difficulties understanding and adhering to the principles of "land for peace" the basis and foundation of the entire exercise and his political "generosity" and magnanimity" never went beyond offering peace for . . . peace" and the perpetuation of the territorial status quo. In Madrid he looked as though he had been ambushed and trapped. He sounded anachronistic and out of place. Months later, in June 1992, Madrid resulted in the electoral Waterloo for Shamir who, back in opposition admitted and confessed that he intended to play delaying tactics at the negotiating table for ten years while accelerating settlement-building and accomplished facts on the ground creating thus an irreversible situation that even the peace process would not overcome.

From Madrid, the bilateral talks moved to Washington and the multilateral talks (arms control, economic development and integration, water, environment and refugees) literally to the four corners of the world. In Washington, resorting to "corridor diplomacy", the Palestinian team succeeded in imposing an Israeli recognition of the gradual decoupling of the Jordanian and Palestinian tracks while the composition of the different layers of the Palestinian team PLO co-ordinators, diaspora advisors, Jerusalem spokespersons reflected more and more the different categories of Palestinians that Israel wanted to see excluded.

But in Washington, the talks quickly stagnated and the change of Israeli government, from Likud to Labour, did nothing to reinvigorate them. The head of the Israeli negotiating team was confirmed in his functions signalling more continuity rather than change and Israel amused itself, but not the others, by sometimes giving the semblance of an impression that it might shift the emphasis from the Palestinian to the Syrian track or back to the Palestinian without any tangible achievement anywhere.

In the meantime the level of support among public opinions started to be seriously eroded. In Palestine, on their return from Madrid, the Palestinian team were welcomed by massive and spontaneous demonstrations where a new subversive weapon the olive branch was brandished proudly. But, by now, disenchantment and scepticism prevailed and radicalism was again on the ascendancy.

It is at this juncture that a secret channel was opened in Oslo by the Israeli government and the PLO and when, in August 1993 the breakthrough was announced, it took almost everybody by surprise including the official negotiators in Washington. I keep saying, maybe impertinently, that if the Oslo channel has not yet put fully Palestine on the map, it has put Norway on the map. I usually offer this thought as an additional incentive to third parties with a potential for a decisive role in peacemaking.

The Declaration of Principles agreed upon in Oslo was signed on the White House lawn on September 13, 1993 with the world as witness. Even the reluctant hand extended by Rabin after an encouraging nod from Clinton to Arafat's enthusiastic availability did not ruin the mood or alter the general perception that History was in the making. It must be said here that Israel was finally negotiating with the Palestinian National movement as such representing the totality of the people as an indivisible unit.

Yet the magic, the spell, the charm were of short duration. Again at the negotiating table in Taba, the Palestinians were stunned to discover that Israel intended to keep 40 per cent of the Gaza Strip during the interim period. After laborious negotiations only 28 per cent remained under Israel's exclusive control and those were 28 per cent too many knowing the Palestinian need for every single square inch in over-crowded Gaza. Also the Israelis interpreted the "Jericho area" to withdraw from as close as possible to the city limits far beneath Palestinian expectations for freeing the "Jericho province". Again "constructive ambiguities" in diplomacy proved to be a dangerous recipe.

Israel should be aware that redeployment out of Gaza was a Palestinian gift to Israel, and not the other way round bearing in mind how unmanageable Gaza was for the occupying authorities. For the Palestinians, the test of Oslo, the credibility and the believability of Oslo resided in further redeployment in the West Bank. If the process became static, the very pillars of its legitimacy would be seriously shaken. Yet Rabin was in no hurry repeating that "dates are not sacred" even though in the often unsatisfactory Oslo agreement, the only precise area was the calendar of events. I believed and often repeated then that "a territory that was occupied in 1967 in less than six days, could be also evacuated in less than six days so that Mr. Rabin could rest on the seventh.

The assassination of Rabin by a fanatic right-winger sent shock waves through Israeli society. Peres, his successor, decided to move fast towards redeployment from the urban centres of the West Bank so that the Palestinians could go ahead with their presidential and legislative elections. Yasser Arafat had in the meantime obtained from the Islamic tendencies, through persuasion and also better control, several months of an unproclaimed cease-fire. During this period, it was the Israeli government and their secret services who were provoking the Islamists and not the Islamists provoking Israel. Dr Fathi Shikaki, leader of Islamic Jihad was assassinated in Malta in October 1995 and Yehya Ayyash was exploded by telephone in Gaza early in January 1996 in the midst of Palestinian territory and election campaign.

Retaliation was to be predicted and, as expected, happened in March 1996 both in West Jerusalem and in Tel Aviv. Israel immediately resorted to its customary policy of closures and collective punishments that totally crippled Palestinian society and suffocated Palestinian economy. The date of Israeli elections having been already advanced to May 1996, Peres decided to out-Likud Likud in his campaign message to the extent that observers commented that "with a dove like that who needs hawks, with a left like that who need a right?" He even waged an unnecessary war on Lebanon and then succeeded in failing again in the Knesset elections.

To-day, there is a tendency to view the Labour-led era with nostalgia. In a way, this is simply the prolongation of the undeserved praise and positive media coverage labour usually got, whether right or wrong. History will record that, when Netanyahu assumed power, the Palestinian side already had 34 legitimate grievances on agreed upon issues that were left unimplemented during the interim period: freedom of movement for people and products, the management of the passages towards Jordan and Egypt, and through them to our Arab hinterland, the free passage the corridor linking the Gaza strip to the West Bank, the port, the airport, the freeze on settlement building. But now Netanyahu carried away by his victory, his ideological inclinations, his demagogic promises and a successful first trip to Washington, where Senators and Congressmen shamelessly gave him several standing ovations, simply declared war on the Peace Process which he views as the continuation of war but by other means. The battle for Jerusalem was immediately waged, first with the opening of a

controversial tunnel then by the bulldozers in Jabal Abu Ghoniem. The mounting pressures, local and international, resulting from the tunnel crisis forced Netanyahu to implement an 80 per cent redeployment in Hebron city. This was applauded, maybe too enthusiastically, as an indication that the pragmatic Netanyahu was prevailing on his more ideological nature. For the first time Likud negotiated with the PLO and Likud was seen withdrawing within the West Bank. That victory was short-lived since he immediately rewarded or compensated his indispensable extreme right-wing coalition partners with bulldozers in Jabal Abu Ghuniem. The settlement there would be innocently repackaged as a "suburb". A week earlier, few Israelis had ever heard of "Har Homan". Now, abandoning the site became equivalent to "national suicide".

I personally believe that, had Labour been in power, we would also have had a deadlocked situation. We have now finally reached the moment of truth: final status issues and the gaps, if the parties are left to themselves, are simply unbridgeable.

In spite of all the diplomatic agitation, the local parties are left to themselves. And the overwhelming military superiority Israel enjoys encourages its insatiable appetite making impossible an acceptable compromise. In the absence of decisive external input by third parties, this process is doomed to failure. Yes, it is true, the European Union have nominated a special envoy, yet his mediating efforts need a clearer mandate and, surely, more muscle. In the meantime, the Russians were busy managing their decline and occupied in occupying Chechnya. Warren Christopher and/or Dennis Ross, though frequent visitors to the area, project the image of messengers with no message. The USA, a superpower all over the globe, seems to have abdicated this particular role in the Middle East in favour of its regional ally Israel. The American Congress is even more supportive of Israeli extravagance than the Knesset itself validating the perception of "Capitol Hill as that other Israeli occupied territory that needs to be liberated" if we are to have a successful peace process.

American decision-makers, but also other Western capitals, better realise soon, that unlike the fifties, the sixties and the seventies when Israel marketed itself as a bastion against militant Arab nationalism, Israeli intransigence today defies, destabilises and delegitimises a profoundly pro-Western Arab regional State-system. In this context, is Israel a strategic asset or a liability? Awaiting the storm that will inevitably come, one wonders whether there is a convergence or rather a divergence and a bifurcation between Israeli ambitions and Western interests

Years ago, during another depressing moment, a joke was fashionable in certain circles. Brejnev and Reagan went to see God and asked him whether there will be detente between their respective countries. God, it seems, said: "yes, but not during your lifetime". Yasser Arafat heard about it and rushed to see God and asked: "God, God Almighty, will there ever be peace in Palestine?" According to reliable sources, God looked melancholically at Arafat and said: "Yes, Yes, of course, but not during My lifetime."

I am sure God would not mind being proven wrong on this one.

Afif Safieh was born in Jerusalem in 1950.

Studied in Jerusalem at the "College Des Frères".

In 1972, he obtained his licence in Political Science and International Relations from the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium.

– In 1974, he finished his cycle supérieur (3eme cycle) en Sciences Politiques from the Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, Paris.

– He was President of the Belgian section of the General Union of Palestinian Students from 1969 until 1971, then President of the French branch in 1974-1975.

– Between 1976 and 1978, he was deputy director of the Palestine Liberation Organisation Observer Mission to the United Nations, Geneva.

– Between 1978 and 1981, he was staff member in President Arafat's office in Beirut, in charge of European Affairs and UN institutions.

– Between 1981 and 1985, he was a researcher at the Centre for European Studies in the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium.

– Between 1985 and 1987, he was visiting scholar at the Centre for International Affairs, Harvard University.

– From 1987 until 1990, he was PLO representative to the Netherlands.

– He was involved in November-December 1988 in Stockholm negotiations that led to the official and direct American-Palestinian dialogue.

– Since September 1990, he is the Palestinian General Delegate to the United Kingdom.

– In January 1995, he was invited to join the International Board of Trustees of Bethlehem University, the Vatican-sponsored University in Palestine.

– Nominated Palestinian General Delegate to the Holy See, he presented his letter of credentials to His Holiness Pope John Paul II on November 6, 1995.

– Compilations of his articles have appeared in two books:

'Self determination', published by Al-Fajr printing press, Jerusalem, 1986 (jointly with his wife Christ'l Leclercq).

'One People Too Many?', published in The Hague in 1987.

and a booklet: Children of a Lesser God? published by the Palestinian General Delegation to the United Kingdom in 1997, by GA-Type Printers.

– He is married and has two girls: Diana and Randa.



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